

## There's Only Us by MarchOfTheFalseHeteros

**Category:** Falsettos - Lapine/Finn, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Anti-Semitic slurs, Crossover, F/M, I Love My Eighties Horror Children, I have a soft spot for works that take place in the 80s okay, M/M, Spoken by asshole bullies but still, Unrequited Crush, anti-Semitism

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jane Hopper, Jason (Falsettos), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Max Mayfield, Mendel (Falsettos), Mike Wheeler, Trina (Falsettos), Will Byers

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**Summary:**

After the death of his dad, Jason moves to Hawkins, Indiana with his mom and stepdad, and finds an unlikely group of friends.

Crossover between Stranger Things and Falsettos.

## 1. The New Kid- Part 1

Trina and Mendel figured a change of environment would do them all some good. What they were REALLY saying, Jason thought, was that it was better to pretend nothing had happened. Completely start over. Sweep their problems under the rug or some such bullshit. It's not like Dad and Whizzer were going to stop being dead once they arrived in Hawkins.

But whatever, it was what it was. He might as well deal with it.

Naturally, the first few days of his freshman year at Hawkins High School were a nightmare. Whereas there were a few black families in town, Jason was the only Jewish kid at his school, which those assholes Troy and James simply wouldn't let up on. Though things went a bit too far after the 3 o'clock bell that Friday. He arrived at his locker after final period to discover somebody had painted a cross on the door. After a moment of his heart sinking, Troy suddenly snuck up behind him and pushed his shoulders. When Jason turned to face him, his lips curled into a sneer.

"Kike," he spat.

Jason had had plenty of experience punching out assholes the year following Whizzer's death, which was yet another reason for the move, so his next course of action came with no hesitation. But before he could do any real damage, James snuck up behind him, covered his face with the back of his jacket, and joined Troy in punching him, each blow punctuated with a groan. Troy then uncovered his face, pinned him against his locker, and hissed in his ear.

"You're gonna wish you never tried to fight back, you stupid Jew."

Before Jason had a chance to react, though, James, as if by magic, was flung against the lockers behind him, and Troy was yanked back by his hair. Jason closed his eyes, turning away from the dreadful, yet awe-inspiring scene. Then, he heard a vaguely familiar voice saying:

"Leave him alone. He's with us now."

Then, the all-too-welcome sound of sneakers running away. After opening his eyes, and after the initial shock wore off, Jason realized

he was still suspended in midair despite no longer being upheld, but was slowly drifting down to the floor. When he landed, he turned around to see his rescuer- Jane Hopper, the short, curly-haired girl from his science class, her nose dripping with blood, standing triumphant with his other classmates- Mike Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Dustin Henderson, Will Byers, and Max Mayfield.

“Are you okay?” Jane asked.

A pause.

“Y-yeah, I’m fine,” Jason stuttered, staring at her with disbelief.

“Thank you.”

Jane wiped her nose and smiled. “You’re welcome.”

“Wanna come hang with us at my house? Play some Dungeons and Dragons?” Mike asked. “You can be the Paladin.”

Jason nodded wordlessly.

“Don’t let Troy and James bug you- they’re assholes,” Lucas said, as the group started walking outside towards the bike rack.

“Yeah,” Max added, “But they won’t be bugging you anymore now, right, El?”

“Mouth breathers,” said Jane, earning a laugh from the others.

“Okay,” Jason snapped finally. “We’re just not going to address the fact that Jane just moved those guys with her mind? Anyone mind explaining that?”

The others looked at one another. Dustin suppressed a chuckle.

“We’ll explain everything at my house,” Mike said.

## 2. The New Kid- Part 2

“I was an experiment. Because of my gift. They took me from Mama. The man I called Papa did bad things. I had no friends. Nothing.”

Jane rolled up her sleeve for the transfixed Jason, who recoiled in horror at the tattooed number 011 on her forearm. He had heard all too many horror stories of the Holocaust from Mendel’s Bubbe and Dad’s Zayde, and had seen their own tattoos firsthand. He couldn’t even imagine the horrors Jane had been subjected to in that lab, and didn’t care to. He was almost sick for a second, but was quickly comforted by Will and Mike.

“You need some Sprite?” asked Dustin, holding up his Big Gulp. Jason shook his head wordlessly.

“Cool, more for me,” said Dustin, earning a punch from Lucas.

“I’m sorry,” said Jane, giving Jason’s arm a tentative pat. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“No. It’s not your fault. I just...I can’t even imagine. I’m sorry,” Jason said breathlessly.

“I forgive you,” said Jane.

“No, El,” said Mike, a faint smile on his lips. “He means, he feels bad about what happened to you, and he wishes things were different. Usually people say ‘thank you’ after that.”

“Oh. Thank you,” Jane said, grinning, which earned her a faint chuckle from the still-shaking Jason.

“Don’t worry about it, Jane,” he said finally. “I can’t always figure out what people mean either. I never had a lot of friends back in New York.”

“Hey, we’ve all got our own shit, dude,” said Dustin. “I’m the weird-looking kid, Lucas is the black kid, Will’s the sissy, Max is the tomboy, El’s...well, El, and Mike... I mean, he and Will were sort of how we all found each other.”

“Yeah,” said Lucas. “It must have been around third grade, and my family and I had just moved to Hawkins. We were one of the only black families here, so no one knew what to say to me. I was miserable until Mike and Will came up to me while I was on the swing set at recess one day, and we just sort of...talked for awhile. And the rest is history.”

“What we’re saying is,” said Will, “You’re part of the Party now.

We're all outcasts in some way. You can trust us."

Jason bit his lip. He finally had someone- six someones, in fact- his own age that he could talk to. He had only known these six someones- really known them, not just in a classroom setting- for a little over an hour, yet he felt as if he could tell them anything. So he told them everything.

"So...my dad's gay," he began.

"Wow. THAT'S a way to start a story," said Dustin, earning yet another slap from Lucas.

"Gay?" Jane asked.

"It means he likes boys," said Will.

"I like boys. Does that mean I'm gay?" Jane asked.

The others, even Jason, burst out laughing, earning a confused gaze from Jane.

"No, no. If you're a guy and you like guys, you're gay. If you're a girl and you like guys, you're straight," Will explained.

"Oh," said Jane.

"Yeah. So anyway, he and my mom divorced when I was like 10, and he went off with this guy named Whizzer, and she married my dad's psychiatrist."

A pause.

"So is his name really Whizzer?" said Dustin, obviously trying his best not to laugh.

"No, everyone just called him that-I'm not sure why. His real name was Micah. Anyway, he and I were really close. He came to all my baseball games, and..." He paused to take out his backpack and remove a slightly worn Polaroid camera with a shoulder strap, to which the group responded with murmured approval. "He was a great photographer too. This used to be his- he gave it to me for my bar mitzvah."

He noticed Jane's look of confusion, and added, "That's, like, a big party Jewish kids have for their thirteenth birthday." He paused, and looked at the floor, trying to suppress the tears he felt beginning to form. "He, uh...was in the hospital that day. He had the AIDS virus. But I couldn't stand him not being there. He was part of the family, so I decided to bring the party to him. The last thing he said to me was 'thank you'."

The tears began to flow freely then.

“Gone?” El asked, putting a hand on his.

“Yeah. And then my dad, about a year later.”

“Gone too?”

“Gone too. That’s why we moved here. My mom, stepdad, and I. They thought I’d be happier if I got away. But I’m not. I won’t be happy no matter where I go.”

He sniffled desperately and buried his head in his hands. His newfound friends held him close for what seemed like hours, until his weeping died down. He wiped his nose, and looked up.

“Thank you,” he said softly.

“I’m sorry,” said Jane.

The group erupted in laughter once more, and Jane, once she realized her mistake, joined in.

“Okay,” said Dustin, trying to hide the tightness in his throat and the wetness in his eyes. “Now that we’re all bummed out, who’s up for some DnD?”

The group played well into the night, and Jason, for the first time in months, felt like all was right with the world.

### 3. The Men in the Shadows- Part 1

Nothing was out of the ordinary on that chilly October morning except for the fact that Jane wasn't seated at her desk next to Mike during first period science class. It wasn't like her to be late- Hopper was adamant that early was on time, and on time was late. However, crotchety Miss Parkhearst had barely begun her opening spiel when she burst through the door, scrambling breathlessly to her seat.

"Why, Miss Hopper- how kind of you to join us today," Miss Parkhearst droned.

"Slept late. Sorry," she gasped as she took her seat next to Mike.

As the lesson continued, Mike and company focused their attention on their friend, who, indeed, looked like she hadn't had a wink of sleep all night- her eyes were glazed over, and her hair looked even more disheveled than usual.

"Jeez, El, you look awful. What happened?" Jason began.

"Nothing. Just slept late."

"That's not true. You're never late for class," said Mike.

"It's nothing," said Jane, more insistently.

Miss Parkhearst "a-hem"-ed sharply. Mike spoke again, softer this time.

"Come on, this isn't nothing. Just tell us."

A pause.

"Not now. After school."

They gathered in the spare room in the library, their newfound hideout, immediately after the 3 o'clock bell, and flicked on the light.

"So what happened?" Dustin asked.

"Promise you won't tell?" said Jane.

The group thought a moment. What could have happened that was this awful?

"Promise," said Mike finally.

Jane closed her eyes, inhaling sharply. "I had dreams. Terrible dreams."

"That's it?" said Lucas.

"I dreamt I hurt you. All of you. Said awful things to you. I couldn't stop. All I wanted to do was- " she began to weep, covering her eyes with her hands.

"Was kill," Will finished.

The group looked at him, remembering all too well the terror of watching their friend become possessed by the Demogorgon mere months prior.

“But you don’t think-“ Lucas began.

“I don’t know.” Will said quietly.

“You don’t know? Will, the gate is closed. We’re perfectly safe. There’s no need to start accusing El of something she didn’t do,” said Mike defensively.

“Did I accuse her of anything? All I’m saying is, we don’t know. I didn’t know what I was doing the entire time that thing was inside me.”

Mike glared at him, and turned away, patting El’s shoulder.

“El...it was just a dream. We know you would never hurt us. I trust you,” said Jason, holding her hand and locking eyes with her.

“Okay?”

She sniffled, and answered, “Okay.”

A few days later, the girls were in the bathroom during lunch period, where Max was helping Jane brush her curls into a ponytail as they chatted.

“Jason said earlier he wants to take a break from DnD tonight, and play some chess instead,” said Max.

“Good,” sighed Jane. “I hate DnD. Too boring.”

“Of course YOU think it’s boring,” laughed Max, “You’ve been through it in real life.”

They chuckled as Max finished, showing off Jane’s new ‘do in the mirror.

“See? Isn’t that better? Your hair’s out of your eyes now.”

Jane smiled. “Pretty.”

“Hey, I thought your word was ‘bitchin’ now,” Max said.

“Both?” asked Jane, at which they both began to giggle again.

“I bet your boyfriend’s sure gonna like it,” joked Max.

As they turned to leave, Jane suddenly snapped her head towards Max and looked her dead in the eyes.

“Stay away from him, you whore,” she barked, her voice cold and menacing.

Max took a double take, and mumbled, “W-what?”

“What?” asked Jane, as if nothing had happened.

“Um...you just called me a whore,” said Max indignantly.

“Whore?” said Jane in that inquisitive tone she used whenever

someone used a word she didn't recognize.

"Don't play dumb- I just heard you," said Max, becoming more annoyed.

"But I didn't say it! I promise!"

"Whatever. See you later," Max sighed, leaving.

Jane stood frozen for a few moments, and jumped when she heard the bell signaling the end of lunch. Maybe she was going crazy after all.

## 4. The Men in the Shadows- Part 2

That night at Mike's house, Jason was just finishing up mercilessly beating Dustin at chess, to the Party's collective satisfaction.

"Come on, dude- seven games in a row? You have to be cheating," Dustin sighed.

"How am I supposed to cheat at chess?" Jason retorted.

Dustin paused, then pouted and said, "You're a dick, Jason Cohen."

"At least I HAVE one," he said, earning a high-five from Max and Lucas.

"Jason!" called Mrs. Wheeler from upstairs. "Phone for you!"

He ran upstairs, and picked up.

"Hi, honey! It's Mom."

"Hey, what's up?" he mumbled.

"Listen, honey," his mother began. " I'm really glad you've been having fun with your new friends, but it's almost 11. I don't know how I feel about you staying out this late. Especially since, and you didn't hear this from me, your friend Will got lost in the woods the winter before last; scared his poor mother half to death."

Jason, of course, knew the truth about the incident, but he didn't dare tell his mother, lest she forbid him from ever speaking to the Party again.

"I'd like you home in 15 minutes, please," she said firmly.

"Ugh, but Mom..." Jason groaned.

"Jason Isaac Cohen, unless you want me to have an anxiety attack, or throw your Atari in the trash, you'll be home in 15 minutes. Understand?" Oh God. The Jewish mom voice.

"Jason! Listen to your mother," he heard Mendel calling faintly.

"Fine," he sighed.

He hung up, and ran downstairs again, his head low. "Sorry, guys. I have to go- my mom used her Jewish mom voice, so she means business," he said.

The group groaned collectively, except Dustin.

"Cool, maybe someone else can win for a change," he said, earning his requisite slap from Lucas.

Jason said his goodbyes, gathered his backpack, and pulled his hoodie over his ears to protect against the frigid October winds.

His bike winded gently down the dark dirt road, his flashlight beaming in front of him. He thought again about what his mom had said, and chuckled to himself. Sure, the stories his friends had told him were creepy and all, but if he could have anyone on his side when fighting off monsters, he wouldn't choose anyone but them. As his breath continued to puff from his mouth, clear as smoke, he noticed something out of the corner of his eye- a figure, appearing suddenly on the side of the road, startling him. He stopped, and looked. It seemed to be a male, long and lean, and he soon noticed that there was another man standing right beside him, shorter, and more muscular. At first he wasn't sure why he simply couldn't look away from them, but he soon realized that it was because they looked vaguely familiar.

"Hello?" he called to them softly. The figures turned to face him.

No. Couldn't be.

It was Dad and Whizzer. Just standing. Holding hands. Looking at him. Smiling gently.

Jason's heart stood still.

"Hey, son," Marvin said suddenly.

"What the fuck?!" Jason shouted.

"Hey, kid, watch your language," said Marvin admonishingly.

"I-it can't be," Jason stuttered.

"What do you mean?" said Whizzer, furrowing his brow. "We just wanted to come see you. We miss you."

"We love you, sport," said Marvin, a lump appearing to gather in his throat.

Jason almost began to cry too, but he resisted.

"No. You're not real," he said.

"How can you say that?" Whizzer said pleadingly. "Of course we are."

"You're not real. You're not real," Jason kept repeating, moreso to convince himself than anything.

"Come with us, son," said Marvin softly, lovingly, as he walked towards him, extending a hand.

"You stay away from me!" Jason screamed, recoiling.

"Is that any way to speak to your father after not seeing him for over two years?" Marvin said almost jokingly, continuing to extend his

hand until it brushed Jason's.

Jason fled and continued to scream as he hopped onto his bike and pedaled faster than he ever had in his life. The only thing he could hear was his own panting. As soon as he saw the approaching lights of his house, he skidded to a stop and stumbled up the driveway and through the door, slamming it behind him.

He tried to slow his breathing as he entered his living room, so as not to alert his mom or Mendel. But he couldn't help jumping when Mendel entered, tapping his wristwatch.

"17 minutes. Not too bad, kiddo," he said, chuckling. His brow furrowed when he noticed the shaken state of his stepson.

"Hey, kid, what's the matter? You okay?"

"Y-yeah. You just startled me, that's all," said Jason, trying his best to keep his breathing in check.

"Did your mother freak you out with all that talk of your friend going missing? Christ, God love her, but she can be so dramatic sometimes," Mendel laughed.

Jason joined in. "Yeah, that's Mom for you," he chuckled breathlessly.

"Well. Night, kid," said Mendel, patting him on the shoulder.

"Night," said Jason, heading into his room.

He closed the door and ran his fingers through his long, curly hair. Could he tell the guys about this? Could this have anything to do with El's dreams? What the hell was going on? Uneasily, he climbed into bed and gradually drifted off to sleep, but was still unable to shake the image of his dead father and friend reaching for him, beckoning him toward...he didn't want to know where.

## 5. Mazel Tov

### Summary for the Chapter:

In which Jim is a Good Dad and Mike is a Good Boyfriend

Jim stirred groggily from the couch around 6 am, and slumped immediately to Jane's bedroom and tapped on the door lightly, so as to avoid the fiasco from the other week in which she missed the bus. "Come on, kiddo- time to get up," he said sleepily.

No response, except for a light groan.

"El? Honey, you okay?" he called.

Another groan.

He entered to find her buried beneath the covers. When he pulled them back gently, her skin was pale, and her eyes were puffy and red.

"Aw, honey... another sleepless night?" he said, stroking her sweaty, matted hair.

"Yes," she said weakly.

"You have those dreams again?" he asked, meeting her eyes.

She thought a moment. "I don't remember."

He rubbed his temples. "Tell you what. You can stay home from school today."

"But Daddy..."

"I'm not trying to punish you, kid. You're sick. I don't want you to go to school feeling miserable," he said.

She sighed, and turned to bury her face in her pillow.

"Tell you what..." he began, patting her back. "I'm off to work. You stay here, and get some rest. Watch some TV. When I get home I'll bring you all the Eggo's you can eat. Sound good?"

She turned to face him. "Promise?"

"Promise."

"I'm supposed to go to Mike's house tonight. Jason's going to teach me how to play chess."

"Well...we'll see how you're feeling, okay?" he chuckled, mussing her hair.

"Okay."

He turned to leave, and heard her say behind him, "I love you,

Daddy.”

He turned, smiled softly, and said, “Love you too, kid.”

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Jim sat at his desk, mulling over some paperwork. It had overall been a slow year since the Gate had been closed- no monsters, no alternate dimensions, no nothing. Not that he was complaining. Hell, he’d take boring over fearing for his life any day. He took another sip of coffee, ate another bite of his donut, and jumped when he heard a slight rattle in the distance. No one else seemed to have heard it, so he chalked it up to lack of sleep. But then he heard it again. He realized that, based on the direction from which it was coming, the sound must have originated in the supply closet. Dammit, another raccoon, probably. At least he was getting to get up and do something. He grabbed a broom from the corner of the room, made his way to the closet, and opened the door rapidly, ready to shoo the little critter out. But no little critter was there. What he did see made him freeze. A little girl, about five years old, with enormous, piercing blue eyes and blonde hair which she wore in pigtails.

Sara.

Jim couldn’t breathe for several seconds.

“Hi, Daddy,” the thing which resembled his daughter said suddenly, causing him to yelp and double over in horror. He struggled to pull himself up and not vomit in the process, but out of morbid fascination he simply had to look again, to ensure that he wasn’t completely falling off the deep end, and that he did, in fact, just see the ghost, or whatever the fuck, of his deceased little girl. He closed his eyes tight before gazing within the closet again.

Nothing. Okay, maybe he *was* going off the deep end. He was stressing himself out with El being sick, and it was manifesting itself in hallucinations of his daughter. That made sense. He went into the bathroom and splashed some cold water on his face. He looked his reflection in the eyes for a few moments.

“No matter what happens,” he told himself, “You will not lose it. Got it? She needs you.”

He took a deep breath, and made his way back to his desk.

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Jane was sitting up in bed, idly flipping through the channels, when she heard a knock at the door- not her and Daddy's special knock. A surge of anxiety ran through her. Groaning, she got out of bed and walked limply toward the door.

“Who is it?” she called weakly.

“It’s Mike!” she heard the familiar voice call, causing her anxiety to subside. “I brought your homework.”

She rolled her eyes. Even when she was sick she still had to worry about homework? School was so strange.

She opened the door for him, trying her best to smile despite how weak she felt.

“Jeez, El, you look awful,” he said. “Feeling any better?”

She looked into his lovely brown eyes, and then noticed he was wearing that leather jacket she loved so much. Her heart fluttered.

“A little bit, now,” she said softly, blushing.

“Good. I can still do this, at least,” he said, before kissing her on the forehead. She giggled and blushed again in response. “So, you feel up to coming over?” he added.

She thought a moment. She didn’t *really* feel all that much better, but she hated being cooped up. It was like that first year in the cabin all over again. But then again, she really didn’t want a lecture from Daddy. She decided to compromise- make them “halfway happy,” as Daddy would put it.

“Hold on,” she said, retreating. She quickly found a pen and paper and scribbled a note: *“Feel much better. Went to Mike’s. Be home late. Love, El.”*

“Let’s go,” she said to Mike, smiling and taking his hand in hers.

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Jane was a natural at chess, as Jason soon found out. They were now equally matched, each with three pieces. One precise move would determine the winner, and it was Jane’s turn. She had been calculating her move for the past five minutes, and the rest of the group were practically biting their nails with anticipation.

“Dammit, El, just move already!” Dustin said with a groan.

“Shut up, Dustin- she’s thinking,” said Will, nudging him.

Finally, and with a hush falling over the room, the overhead lights began to flicker slightly, and Jane’s knight began to shake of its own

accord, and zipped up three spaces and across two.

“Checkmate...?” Jane asked uncertainly, raising her eyebrows at Jason.

He poured over the board, looking for any possible ways his king could escape this, and slowly looked up.

“Jane...you’re right. I’m in checkmate...you win! Mazel tov!” he said triumphantly.

The group cheered and crowded her with high-fives and hair tousles. She giggled uncontrollably and tried to hide her blushing face with her hands. A moment later, when she had come down from her winner’s high, she tapped Jason on the shoulder.

“What’s ‘mazel tov’?” she asked.

“Oh...that’s a Hebrew saying. It basically means “good job,” he explained.

“Mazel tov,” she said to herself, almost as if relishing in its beauty. But her smile didn’t last long. She suddenly went pale, and doubled over as if about to throw up. She gripped onto the side of the table for support.

“El...you okay?” Jason asked, looking at her with concern.

She shook her head.

“Are you feeling nauseous again?” Lucas asked.

“Again?” asked Jason.

“She was acting weird like this last week, right after you left early,” said Lucas. “She went in the bathroom to throw up, I guess, and was talking to herself and shit- it was crazy.”

Jason felt his stomach drop slightly.

“You feel like you’re gonna throw up again?” Mike asked gently, stroking her arm.

She nodded, her knees wobbling slightly.

“Okay. Can you make it?” he asked, grabbing her shoulder.

She nodded again, standing slowly.

“I’ll get you some Sprite when you’re done, okay?” Mike said.

She nodded a third time, and limped to the bathroom, slamming the door.

Jason couldn’t help but to wonder.

He feigned needing a drink, and walked by the bathroom door slowly, taking a slight pause to listen. He indeed heard her speaking to herself, but in a voice that wasn't quite her own. He couldn't quite place why, but it certainly wasn't her. Then he heard *what* she was saying.

"Trin? Trin, it's me," he heard her call faintly through the door.

Trin. Dad's old pet name for Mom.

His heart pounded in his chest.

He ran upstairs and filled a glass with water, trembling. This was all making just a bit too much sense. He couldn't tell them tonight, though. When he would, he wasn't sure. But not tonight.

When he went back downstairs, Jane had taken her place at the table again, and seemed in much better spirits. But he couldn't help shaking when he saw her.

"Jason?" she asked when she noticed this. "What's the matter?"

He paused, and almost considered saying something about what he had heard. Almost.

"Nothing. 'Nother game?"

## 6. The Monster in the Bathroom

### Summary for the Chapter:

My kids get drunk and Will confesses his feelings for Mike

The next morning, Jason slumped out of his room and into the kitchen, and sat beside his mother at the table for breakfast. She was sipping her coffee coolly and idly reading a newspaper.

“Morning, honey,” she said chipperly.

Jason said nothing, but picked at his cereal.

“Everything okay?” she asked, trying to meet his gaze.

He nodded wordlessly, looking at the table.

“Honey...” she began, stroking his hair lightly. “You know you can tell me anything, right?” She paused, biting her lip. “I’m sorry I scared you the other night with all that talk of Will going missing. I was just scared for you. I’m a mom, what can I say?”

Jason smiled slightly, and looked at her.

“Tell me what’s going on? Please?” she asked again, giving him that pleading, dopey-eyed look he hated.

“Okay,” he sighed, his palms beginning to sweat. “But do you promise not to tell anyone? Not even Mendel?”

“I don’t know, honey. I can’t promise that until I know what it is.”

He sighed, closing his eyes.

“Okay...” he said, running his hands through his hair and sighing deeply. “That night... I saw Dad and Whizzer on my bike ride home.”

“Oh, honey...” said Trina, hugging him around the neck. “I know, baby. I think that’s normal. It’s been a big change moving all the way out here- I’m not surprised that your grief is manifesting itself in weird ways. Why, last night I thought I saw them too, right here in the kitchen- scared the living daylights out of me.”

“Oh my God...I knew it!” Jason cried, standing upright. “I heard Jane in the bathroom calling you Trin. She has something to do with all this- I know it.”

“All what? Jason, it wasn’t real,” Trina said, standing and holding his face.

“Yes, it was, Mom! They talked to me,” Jason said, swatting her hands away.

Trina looked as if she might cry for a moment, but inhaled deeply. “You know...” she began, “I could have sworn I heard them talk to me too.”

“You did! It was them, Mom! Dad reached out and touched me! Something’s going on here!” Jason was pacing madly about the kitchen now, his hands flying wildly. Trina stopped him, putting her hands on his shoulders and looking him dead in the eyes.

“Jason...you’re scaring me. I don’t think all these late nights and playing those monster games are good for you,” she said somberly.

“Mom, what are you talking about?” said Jason, concerned.

She breathed deeply before speaking again. “I don’t think those kids are a good influence on you. Clearly they’ve been filling your head with all this nonsense, and it’s doing more harm than good. I think...” She looked at the floor momentarily. “I think you shouldn’t hang out with them as much anymore.”

“WHAT?” Jason shouted, swatting her hands away again. “Are you insane?! I was miserable until I started hanging out with them! No one at that goddamn school likes me!”

“Jason...don’t speak that way to your mother. This is for your own good. I know you’ll make other friends if you just put yourself out there-“

“Shut up!” Jason shouted, holding back tears. “That’s bullshit! You know I won’t!”

“Jason Isaac Cohen!” Trina gasped. “How dare you-“

He stormed off to his room and flung the door open, ignoring her.

“I hate you!” he yelled before slamming the door in his mother’s face. He flopped onto his bed and tried to ignore her sniffling through the door. He buried his head in his pillow and screamed until his throat burned. He screamed out of guilt at having pulled the “hate” card on his mother who was just trying her best. He screamed out of anger and desperation and grief at the loss of his father and Whizzer. He screamed out of pain at the loss of his only friends. He screamed out of feeling completely, utterly alone.

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That night, not having left his room all day, Jason laid in bed idly reading a Wolverine comic when he heard something tapping against his window. He looked outside to see Max wearing a beanie and a mischievous smile, and Lucas sloppily hanging his head on her

shoulder. He opened the window, letting in the cold air.

“What the hell are you doing?” he hissed.

“Anti-Homecoming at my house. Remember?” Max yelled.

Oh yes. The events of the week had almost made him forget. About a month prior Max had promised to grab a bottle of booze from her dad’s liquor cabinet while her parents and Billy were out of town so the Party could have some fun in her basement. Obviously Lucas had already partaken.

“My mom would kill me,” he called softly.

Max waved the bottle of Jack Daniel’s in her hand teasingly. He looked to his right to see Mike on his bike, with El behind him.

Jason glanced back at his door in a moment of hesitation, then furrowed his brow defiantly, climbing out the window and hopping onto the ground.

“Let’s roll,” he said, taking a swig from Max’s bottle, and twisting his face at the sourness.

An hour and a half later, the group had finished the bottle of whiskey, and it more than showed. Dustin was dancing haphazardly to the radio, Jason was lying on his stomach on the couch, almost drifting off to sleep; Max and Lucas were hanging all over each other, belting to the radio, and Will was laying dreamily on Mike’s shoulder. Jane sat off to the side, laughing at her friends’ antics - she had taken one swig of the stuff and declared it “gross,” to the group’s amusement. Just then, the songs on the radio switched and Stand By Me came blaring from the speakers. The group collectively shouted with excitement and gathered in a circle, clumsily putting their arms around each other’s shoulders and shout-singing along.

Jane was confused.

“Wait, guys, we HAVE to teach El this song,” slurred Mike as he noticed her look. “It’s our favorite,” he said to her.

He waited for the chorus to start up, and sang, Jane joining in slowly:

*“So darlin’, darlin’, stand by me,  
Oh, won’t you stand by me,  
Oh, stand,  
Stand by me,  
Stand by me.”*

The rest of the group began belting and hanging on each other as the

second verse began, as Mike planted a sloppy kiss on Jane's lips. She wiped the excess spit away with a laugh. Will, still laying across Mike's shoulder, began to lightly touch his cheek and stroke it, soon planting a gentle kiss on it. Mike looked confused, but not altogether unhappy with it.

Jane snapped her head in Will's direction and gave him a cold stare.

"Why don't you marry him, faggot?" she spat.

The group fell silent. Will looked as if he were about to cry.

"W-what?" he whimpered.

"Why would you say that, El? How do you even know that word?"

Mike said, still slurring, but standing his ground.

"You are one, aren't you?" she growled.

"Why does that matter?" Will said tearfully.

"Admit it," Jane said menacingly.

"What?" Will said, still struggling not to break out into sobs.

"Admit that you're a faggot," Jane nearly whispered.

"Why are you acting like this?" Will yelled.

"Say it," said Jane.

"Stop it," Will said, tears still streaming from his eyes, but balling his hands into fists.

"Say it!"

"El, please stop!" Mike shouted.

"SAY. IT!" she said, an inch from Will's face.

"OKAY. FINE," Will said finally, gripping his hair in his hands tightly.

"I'M A FAGGOT. Okay? Yeah, I said it. I'm gay."

A momentary tense pause.

"Will...is that true?" Mike said softly.

Will hid his eyes.

"I never wanted to admit it because I couldn't stand my dad being right. I pretended because...I don't know, it was like getting back at him, in a way. But yeah. It's true. I'm gay. I always knew." He chuckled slightly. "Honestly I thought the rainbow ship gave it away."

Another pause.

"Will..." Mike began, looking his friend in the eyes and stroking his arm, "...do you like me?"

Will broke down crying.

"I tried so hard to hide it. But it must have been so obvious. I feel so stupid. Look...I know you're gonna be weird around me now and we can't hang out anymore, so I might as well just go."

“Will...” Mike took Will’s hand in his, and made direct eye contact with him. “Shut up. You’re my best friend. This changes nothing. Okay?”

Will wiped his nose. “Promise?”

“Promise.”

Jane took a sudden sharp intake of breath, and looked at the still-sniffling Will.

“What happened? Will, what’s wrong?”

“Are you serious right now?” Mike said, confronting Jane.

“Mike?” Jane said, her brow furrowing concernedly, on the verge of tears herself.

“You called him a faggot and yelled in his face to admit he was gay,” said Dustin.

“What?” said Jane, her head darting between each of her friends.

“Again with this?” Max said. “She did this same thing to me awhile back- she called me a whore and then pretended not to know what I was talking about.”

“Is that true?” said Lucas to Jane, looking ready to smack her.

“No! Did I really say all that?” said Jane breathlessly.

“We just heard you! What the hell’s going on?” Mike said, staring her down.

“Guys!” shouted Jason, sitting up suddenly. “Stop it. El’s our friend. Maybe she’s telling the truth. Maybe...maybe someone’s making her say this stuff.”

“Or something,” Will added darkly.

There was a momentary tense silence. Then, Jane collapsed onto the couch and exclaimed, “I’m gonna throw up.”

Mike ran to her side. “El...let me help you,” he said softly.

“DON’T fucking touch me, cocksucker!” she snapped, looking almost ready to bite him.

Jason ran after her, but she slammed the bathroom door in his face. One second later, violent screaming and thumping erupted from behind the door. Then, the sound of glass shattering. The group huddled in the corner in fear.

“Stop! Please! You’re hurting me!” Jane’s voice cried among animal-like roars and shrieks.

“What kind of Exorcist shit is this?” Dustin cried among the chaos.

Jason tried desperately to open the door, but it was locked.

A minute later, it was flung off its hinges in an instant. A cloud of

dust flooded the room, leaving the group coughing and spluttering. Jane stood in the doorway, the entire front of her blouse stained with the blood streaming from her nose, her hair and eyes wild, and her teeth bared like a rabid dog.

“El. I know this isn’t you. Please let us help you,” said Jason gently, extending his arm.

“Come any closer and I’ll rip you to shreds, you worthless hymie fucker,” she hissed in the voice- the one that wasn’t quite her own. It sounded otherworldly- echoey and guttural all at once. She extended her arm and flung Jason onto his back, leaving him gasping and groaning in pain. Mike tried to approach her slowly, holding his arms in front of him so as to assure her he wasn’t going to hurt her. She growled at the sight of him and flung him backwards, causing him to smack his head against the support beam. Lucas and Dustin pounced on her and tried to tackle her down despite her screaming and blows. All of a sudden, she collapsed in their arms, limp as a noodle. She opened her eyes temporarily and whispered in her own voice: “Help me.”

Her eyes snapped shut once more.

The group stood in silence, stunned by the experience. Jason continued to groan in pain as Dustin and Lucas tended to his wounds. Mike finally broke the silence.

“We have to tell Hopper.”